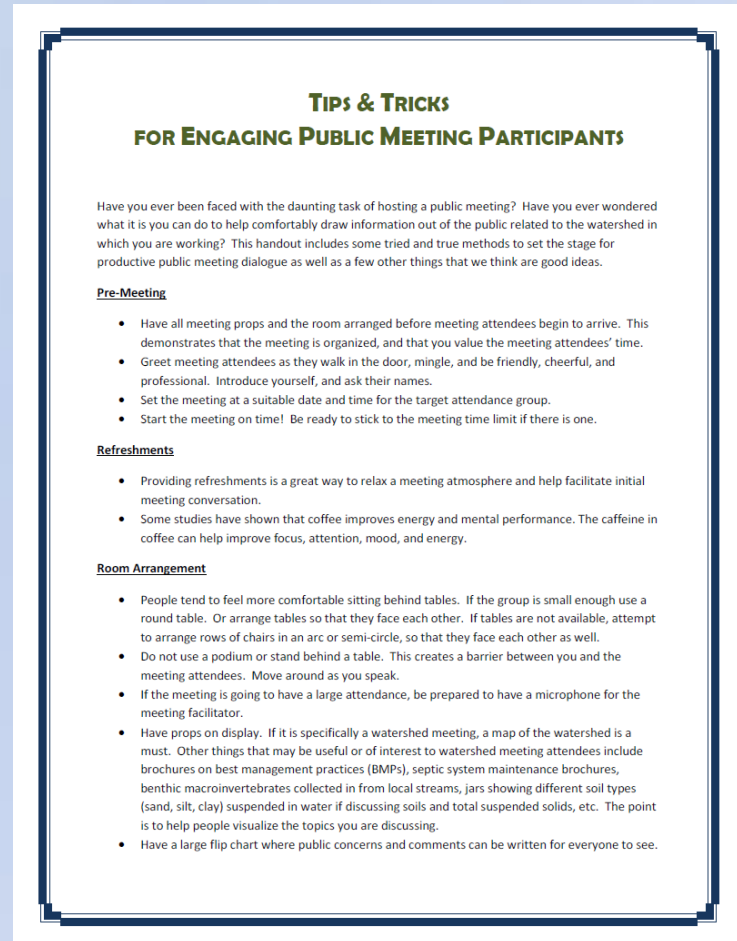


TIPS & TRICKS FOR ENGAGING PUBLIC MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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How do we make the most of our Public meetings?

- Public Meeting Types
 - Special outreach
 - Routine planning meetings
- Interviewed
 - SWCD educators
 - Watershed coordinators
 - MS4 supervisors
 - Plan commission members
- Scoured internet for relevant meeting tips
- 4 page tip handout



<http://indianawatersheds.ning.com/group/groupprojects2/forum/topics/tips-tricks-for-engaging-public-meeting-participants>

The #1 recommendation for encouraging a “good meeting” by interviewees:

- Provide refreshments!



Tip Categories

1. Pre-Meeting
2. Room Arrangement
3. Meeting Introductions
4. Ice Breakers
5. Meeting Language
6. Gathering Public Feedback
7. Meeting Attire
8. Meeting Location
9. Meeting Structure
10. Post-Meeting



Pre-Meeting

- Suitable date and time for the target attendance group
- Have room arranged before meeting attendees begin to arrive.
- Greet meeting attendees as they walk in the door
- Start and end the meeting on time



Room Arrangement

- People tend to feel more comfortable sitting behind tables
 - Arrange tables so that they face each other
 - Arrange rows of chairs in an arc or semi-circle
- Do not use a podium or stand behind a table. Move around as you speak.
- Have a microphone for the meeting facilitator if there will be a large attendance



Room Arrangement

- Have a large flip chart where public concerns and comments can be written for everyone to see.
- Have props on display to help people visualize the topics you are discussing
 - Maps
 - Brochures
 - Macroinvertebrate specimens
 - Jar of water with sediment settled at bottom



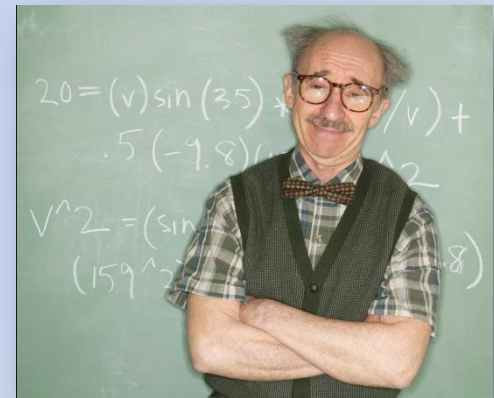
Meeting Introductions

- Introductions are very important!
 - Many people don't like speaking in front of a room of strangers
 - Have everyone state their name and explanation of why they chose to attend the meeting
- Nametags
 - Facilitator: a must if there will be people at the meeting that do not know you
 - Meeting attendees: optional



Ice Breakers

- Try to integrate some fun into the meeting especially at the beginning
- Start with a game of watershed trivia
 - Give a prize to the winner
- Offer a payment bribe
 - Give the first person to speak, “A penny for their thoughts.”
- Give everyone a simple hypothetical situation with a problem to solve



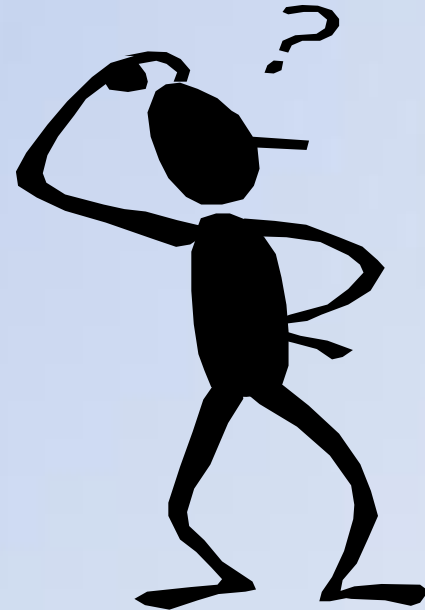
Meeting Language

- Keep your vocabulary simple!
 - For more information on this topic consult:
<http://waterwordsthatwork.com>
 - Less than 50% of the general population can guess the correct definition of watershed out of 4 choices.
 - Only 16% of the general population could guess the correct definition of non-point source pollution out of 4 choices = less than guessing at random
- Empower citizens that they can make a difference for clean water.
 - More important than alienating meeting attendees with big words
 - More important than educating them on technicalities not essential to decision making



Meeting Language

- Don't just talk at meeting attendees, talk to them
 - Mentally engage attendees by routinely asking them questions
 - Try to get everyone involved don't let the same person answer each time
 - Ask rhetorical questions.



Public Feedback

- Provide comment cards and writing utensils
- Be cautious not to belittle *any* public comments or concerns. Do not let anyone else belittle someone else's concerns or comments.
- Microphones
 - Don't require public use microphone or stand when asking questions or contributing to discussion.
 - As facilitator keep the microphone in your hands
 - Facilitator can repeat public comments into microphone, so all meeting attendees can hear.

Public Feedback

- Offer genuine positive feedback. Do not be generic merely stating, “good comment.” Explain why it is a good comment.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Find the appropriate answer after the meeting.
- Record meeting attendees’ comments/concerns on a flip chart that everyone can see.
- Do not let anyone person dominate the conversation. Politely thank them for their contribution and change the topic.

Public Feedback

- Have someone on your team sitting in the audience ask the first question. A lot of people do not like to be the first to speak out, but will gladly enter a dialogue once it has been started.
- Try to have public meeting attendees brainstorm solutions to the concerns that have been presented.
- If you know that a lot of questions or concerns may arise surrounding one or a couple particular topics, have a representative from an organization that deals with the topic be on hand.

Meeting Attire

- Do not dress to impress
 - Dress cleanly and professionally
 - But, keep it casual if that is what you anticipate from meeting attendees



Meeting Location

- Hold the meeting in a non-threatening place
 - Community center
 - Library
 - Church
 - Senior center
- Try to avoid government buildings
 - May give impression of an authority overseeing the meeting
 - May introduce an element of politics associated with the meeting topic



Meeting Structure

- Varying the structure of meetings
 - Open houses
 - Meetings about hot topics (ex. *E. coli*)
 - Meetings to get feedback
 - Guest speakers
 - Presentations from various stakeholder groups
- Vary meeting times
- Mix up seating arrangement

Post-Meeting

- Generate meeting minutes or notes for distribution to help meeting attendees comprehend the progress made in the meeting



Complete list of Tips & Tricks can be found at:

<http://iwatersheds.net>

TIPS & TRICKS FOR ENGAGING PUBLIC MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Have you ever been faced with the daunting task of hosting a public meeting? Have you ever wondered what it is you can do to help comfortably draw information out of the public related to the watershed in which you are working? This handout includes some tried and true methods to set the stage for productive public meeting dialogue as well as a few other things that we think are good ideas.

Pre-Meeting

- Have all meeting props and the room arranged before meeting attendees begin to arrive. This demonstrates that the meeting is organized, and that you value the meeting attendees' time.
- Greet meeting attendees as they walk in the door, mingle, and be friendly, cheerful, and professional. Introduce yourself, and ask their names.
- Set the meeting at a suitable date and time for the target attendance group.
- Start the meeting on time! Be ready to stick to the meeting time limit if there is one.

Refreshments

- Providing refreshments is a great way to relax a meeting atmosphere and help facilitate initial meeting conversation.
- Some studies have shown that coffee improves energy and mental performance. The caffeine in coffee can help improve focus, attention, mood, and energy.

Room Arrangement

- People tend to feel more comfortable sitting behind tables. If the group is small enough use a round table. Or arrange tables so that they face each other. If tables are not available, attempt to arrange rows of chairs in an arc or semi-circle, so that they face each other as well.
- Do not use a podium or stand behind a table. This creates a barrier between you and the meeting attendees. Move around as you speak.
- If the meeting is going to have a large attendance, be prepared to have a microphone for the meeting facilitator.
- Have props on display. If it is specifically a watershed meeting, a map of the watershed is a must. Other things that may be useful or of interest to watershed meeting attendees include brochures on best management practices (BMPs), septic system maintenance brochures, benthic macroinvertebrates collected in from local streams, jars showing different soil types (sand, silt, clay) suspended in water if discussing soils and total suspended solids, etc. The point is to help people visualize the topics you are discussing.
- Have a large flip chart where public concerns and comments can be written for everyone to see.